

The Community Resource Kit

Guidance for people setting up and running community organisations



Section 6

Meetings

THE COMMUNITY RESOURCE KIT

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Introduction

Meetings are essential for discussions, sharing information, making decisions, solving problems and developing relationships. It is important to run meetings that are efficient and productive, that empower staff and volunteers and generate activity.

Types of meetings

Formal meetings

How to organise and run formal meetings, such as annual general meetings (AGMs) and hui Māori. This includes looking at different decision-making styles.

Less formal meetings

Most community organisations run less formal meetings which commonly include:

- checking the minutes or notes from the previous meeting
- checking correspondence and finances
- hearing progress reports on projects and workers' activities
- checking on the progress of your business plan (if you have one), and
- other matters important to the group.

Less formal meetings are usually relaxed, but it's important to make clear decisions that are recorded with majority support. It's up to the organiser or chairperson of the meeting to make sure that happens. Even if the group isn't used to moving, seconding and voting on motions, it's good practice to adopt a formal resolution process for financial and other important decisions. This can be achieved by the meeting organiser or chairperson saying: "Is it agreed that we _____?" and having the decision recorded.

Checklists for well run meetings

Well run meetings produce good results. If meetings aren't run well, you may not achieve what you set out to and participants may not want to come back. Meetings can also take up a lot of people's time so you need to make sure they are run smoothly.

Below are some checklists for ensuring your meetings (both formal and informal) are successful.

Before the meeting checklist

Effective meetings are planned in advance. Make sure that:

- the reason for people meeting face-to-face is clear
- people are invited well in advance
- the time and venue are appropriate for the people you are inviting (check for accessibility, childcare, time to fit with parenting responsibilities, etc.)
- the objectives of the meeting have been communicated and understood
- any reports and/or background papers or financial statements about which decisions need to be made are circulated before the meeting so they can be read and digested
- people have been reminded about any jobs that need to be completed by the time of the meeting
- the physical environment is prepared beforehand (check for warmth, fresh air, light, appropriate seating arrangements, water, etc.)
- appropriate visual aids are in place e.g. whiteboard and markers, sheets of paper, overhead projector, computer(s), data show, recording equipment, etc.

- any other resources needed for the meeting have been collected
- any displays are assembled
- there is an agenda that people attending have had time to discuss and/or suggest items for
- the chair or facilitator knows they will be taking on that role
- the minute-taker knows they are responsible for taking the minutes.

During the meeting checklist

The way a meeting starts is critical to its success. People need to feel welcome and included, and if possible, have the opportunity to introduce themselves.

Chairperson/facilitator

It's the role of the chairperson or facilitator to:

- guide the meeting procedure
- make sure the meeting starts on time
- know whether it's appropriate to begin with a karakia or prayer (particularly if the group is Māori, Pacific Island or church-based). Some other words of welcome – such as inviting people to focus their minds on the matter at hand and share their joint purpose.
- welcome members and invite introductions
- be aware that people may face difficulties arriving on time (such as child-minding) or different cultures may follow different timeframes
- if there are latecomers, welcome them, give them a moment to settle, then tell them what the group is doing
- list any ground rules that have been developed by the members e.g. agreements about confidentiality or one person speaking at a time (see Ground rules)
- read and call for apologies
- where appropriate, advise of housekeeping details e.g. time and length of meeting breaks, location of toilet facilities, etc.
- set a timeframe for the meeting and keep to it
- allow some time at the beginning of the meeting to add additional items to the agenda
- keep to the agenda
- use a range of tools or interventions to assist the group to complete its task, e.g. summarising, clarifying, reflecting, suggesting options, encouraging participation, raising energy levels, seeking agreement and resolving conflicts
- avoid voicing their own opinion unless it's necessary
- as part of the closure, ensure that it's clear what is to be done by whom and when
- thank everyone for attending the meeting
- where appropriate, end with a karakia, prayer or song.

Minute-taker

It's the role of the minute-taker to record agreed decisions and tasks from each meeting. Unless there's a particular reason, it's not necessary to record discussion. The minute-taker should record:

- meeting time, date and venue
- names of those present and any apologies
- name of meeting chair or facilitator and minute-taker
- the purpose of the meeting

- the matters for discussion, agreed action points or decisions made, the person responsible for those actions and completion dates
- date, time, venue and purpose of next meeting.

Ground rules

Ground rules for a meeting should be developed by the group attending and should be adhered to by everyone. These rules should cover:

- respect for other people – no interrupting, no long monologues, no personal attacks or abuse. Allow space for everybody to express their views
- confidentiality – agreement on whether meeting content may be discussed outside the meeting
- responsibility – everybody agrees to take responsibility for timekeeping, keeping to the agenda and voicing opinions in the meeting rather than afterwards
- decision-making – how are decisions to be made, by consensus or voting? If consensus can't be achieved, at what point will alternative decision-making methods be used, and who will decide?

After the meeting checklist

After the meeting has finished, the following jobs need to be done:

- confirm any action plans and follow-ups
- get the minutes checked by the chair or meeting organiser and the minute-taker
- arrange the timeframe for circulation of minutes, new reports, background papers, and the next agenda
- circulate the minutes (sometimes on their own, sometimes not long before the next meeting when reports and background papers called for at the meeting can go out at the same time).
- check that the room is returned to the state it was in prior to the meeting.

Formal meetings

Formal meetings are often required by a group's constitution or governing rules. They have established agendas and procedures. The agenda deals with what's to be covered at the meeting, while procedures cover how that will be done.

Annual general meeting (AGM)

AGMs are usually a reporting requirement for any type of organisation. They are also an important opportunity for all stakeholders, e.g. customers, clients, employees, committee members, suppliers, etc, to review the state of the organisation and to report on its performance.

Tip: For more information on AGMs for different organisational structures such as charitable trusts, incorporated societies and various Māori structures, refer to the Te Puni Kōkiri website: <http://governance.tpk.govt.nz/what/agm.aspx>

Agendas

An agenda is a list of items to be considered at a meeting and gives a meeting direction, structure and purpose. The responsibility for preparing the agenda lies ultimately with the secretary, with some assistance from the chairperson (and treasurer) where appropriate.

The AGM agenda will depend on the legal structure of an organisation, how actively it's been operating during the past year and how much engagement the board is seeking from those using the services.

Regardless of which type of agenda is chosen, preparation is vital so that the meeting runs smoothly and achieves what's needed. The chair, in particular, needs to be well briefed and prepared to manage the proceedings to meet its objectives.

A typical AGM agenda might look like this:

- welcome by chairperson
- apologies
- confirmation of minutes of the previous AGM
- business arising from the minutes
- correspondence
- chairperson's report
- treasurer's report and presentation of audited financial statement
- chairperson stands aside if required
- election of office bearers
- general business
- guest speaker
- question time
- date of next meeting
- close and refreshments.

Tip: Remember to stick to the agenda and not get side-tracked by other issues. Also keep an eye on the time – if the meeting's scheduled for three hours, make sure it lasts for no more than three hours.

Adapted from *Developing Your Organisation Manual*: <https://wiki.qut.edu.au/display/CPNS/Developing+Your+Organisation+Manual>

Procedures

As mentioned earlier, there are established procedures for conducting formal meetings. These procedures might be recorded in an organisation's constitution or rules or be established more informally by the group's usual customs. The procedures can cover a huge variety of matters but some more common aspects include:

- voting rights – who's entitled to vote
- quorums – the minimum number of people required to make a decision
- motions and resolutions – moving and seconding motions, etc
- points of order.

Voting rights

Voting at formal meetings can be by:

- voice vote – if the issue is not very contentious
- show of hands – if a voice vote is not decisive
- ballot – especially if there are more than two outcomes, as when electing officers.

In the case of a ballot, two scrutineers should be appointed – one from each opposing faction, if any. They then give each member a slip of paper with a list of candidates on it and members cross off names of the candidates they do not support. The scrutineers collect the slips and count them outside the meeting room. After counting is completed, the chair moves that ballot papers be destroyed. In the event of a tied vote, the chair has the final (or casting) vote.

Quorums

The rules governing groups generally require a quorum, or minimum number of people, to be present before any meeting can be held. The number can vary depending on the size of the organisation, but it is usually a third of the membership. Decisions at meetings are valid only if there is a quorum present. If a quorum is lost during the meeting, the meeting is declared closed.

Motions and resolutions

A **motion** is a formal recommendation a member puts to a meeting for consideration and debate, by saying “I move that ...” Motions are useful tools in the effective running of a meeting as they help avoid confusion and speed up action. There are two types of motions:

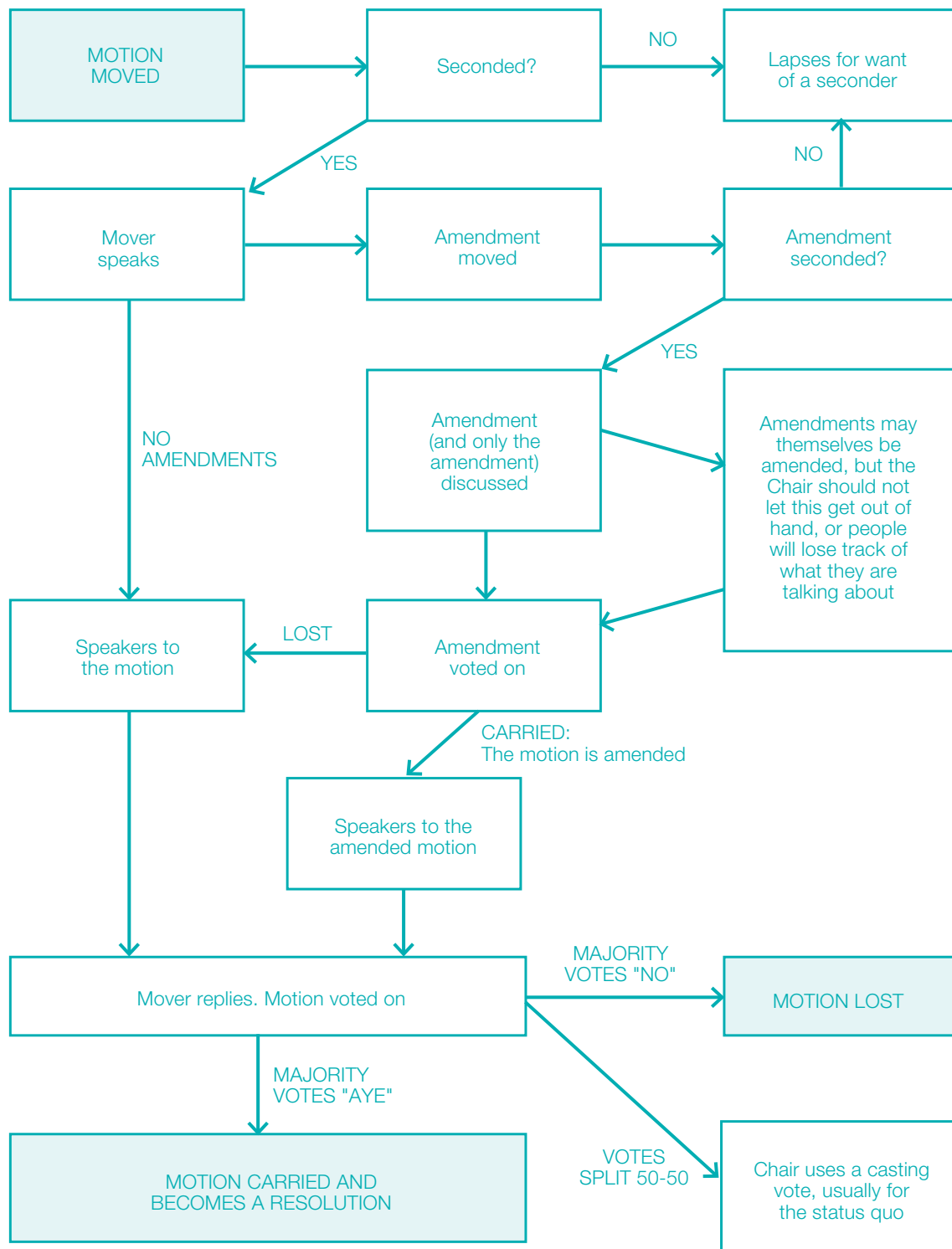
1. those that deal with the business of the organisation itself (substantive motions)
2. those that deal with the way the meeting is run (procedural motions).

Each motion put forward has to be supported (seconded) by another person before discussion. The chair asks the proposer to speak to the motion. Other members can add to this discussion. If there is no discussion, the motion is put to the meeting for a decision, and members indicate (by vote) whether they agree or disagree with it. Only one motion can be considered at a time and all motions should be minuted. If a substantive motion is passed, it becomes a **resolution**.

Motions can be amended before they are voted on – the same procedure is used as when the motion was originally put, but the mover and the seconder of an amendment should not be the same as those of the original motion. If an amendment is not contentious (such as the correction of a name) and is acceptable to the mover and the seconder of the original motion, it may be incorporated without a vote. An amendment cannot be accepted if it goes against the general intention of the original motion.

If an amendment is moved, it should be dealt with before the main (substantive) motion. The meeting then returns to the motion (amended or not) that was first discussed. If the amendment is carried it is incorporated into the motion, which is then further discussed. If required, other motions can be put to further amend it.

Motions and amendments flowchart



Tip: For more information on motions, see An Introduction to Formal Meeting Motions: http://non-profit-governance.suite101.com/article.cfm/an_introduction_to_formal_meeting_motions

Decision rules

In addition to the different procedures involved in making decisions, groups can also have different decision rules. A decision rule is the way the group makes a choice or reaches a decision which can be as important as the decisions themselves. There are no perfect decision-making rules – all can lead to situations where either no decisions are made or the decisions are inconsistent. The three most useful decision rules and their advantages and disadvantages are set out in the table below.

Decision rule	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Decision by majority rule: Requires support from more than 50% of the members of the group. Commonly achieved by voting or less commonly by polling (going around the room and asking each person to say where they stand).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • democratic (i.e. it's assumed that at least more people are for the decision than against it) • one way to get a clear decision • can be a quick process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can disguise a 49% opposition and could leave a sizeable opportunity for resentment • can be divisive in critical issues and create problems for group cohesion and participation.
2. Decision by consensus rule: Requires that a majority approve a given course of action but that the minority agree to go along with it. May be used selectively (e.g. to carry out a major building programme).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allows for full discussion • allows for wide acceptance and therefore support and implementation of the decision • excellent for important or difficult decisions that will subsequently require considerable group participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be very time-consuming • some psychological pressure can be placed on individuals holding out.
3. Decision by unanimous decision rule: Requires everyone to agree on a given course of action.	the most acceptable approach there is, as there is no opposition to a decision eliminates overt psychological pressure.	the most difficult and time-consuming way to reach a decision if all decisions are made this way, a high degree of inefficiency and membership loss may result in the long term, especially among those who want to get things done quickly.

Electoral systems such as plurality and dictatorship refer to the election of governments. However, dissatisfied people might use the terms if conflict arises and they feel excluded from decision-making. This results in there being no real commitment to the course of action chosen, which can lead to problems when a decision is implemented.

Difficulties in decision-making

Why do difficulties arise?

There are times when groups find it difficult to make decisions during a meeting. Some reasons for this include:

- lack of philosophy, goal or clear plan
- inadequate leadership
- processes for decision-making are not clear
- conflicting loyalties or clash of interests
- interpersonal conflict
- people feel unable to freely express differences
- cultural insensitivity
- hidden agendas
- fear of potential consequences
- people think it will take too long or it can't be done at all.

Managing conflict in a group

Conflict might arise within a group because of personal differences, ideological differences, misunderstandings or miscommunication. Rather than trying to avoid or suppress conflict and disagreement, take the opportunity to debate issues to more easily understand and resolve them.

Resolving conflict

There is no single right way to resolve conflict that may arise during meetings, but some key elements should be observed:

- allow enough time to deal with conflict
- define the issue in terms that are clear, neutral and acceptable to all parties in conflict
- have at least one person give special attention to the process – someone impartial or uninvolved
- use reflective listening to explore the issues: summarise what you think is being said at regular intervals
- have parties to the conflict identify their points of view and what their ideal solutions would be.

It is often useful to pre-empt hostile conflict arising during a meeting. Try some of these techniques:

- set ground rules for the meeting
- agree on goals
- agree on a plan
- be clear about the way that decisions will be made (e.g. by consensus)
- offer the freedom to express feelings safely (i.e. without fear of attack or abuse)
- ensure feedback is constructive
- define the issues
- group the options in broad categories
- rank ideas (e.g. each person chooses their three most favoured options)
- break into small groups to re-examine remaining ideas, and report back to the full meeting

- brainstorm solutions by listing possible ways of dealing with the matter
- try out an idea then evaluate it
- suspend judgement – withhold opinions until more information has been obtained
- compromise
- agree to abide by a majority vote
- agree to differ.

Tip: For more ideas on how to make conflict productive see: http://human-resources-management.suite101.com/article.cfm/how_to_make_team_conflict_productive

Mediation

Mediation is a process of resolving conflict that can be used when the level of conflict within the group is beyond the group's own ability to resolve it. In these circumstances, it's useful to bring in a neutral third party to mediate (i.e. a mediator). Use an experienced mediator – mediation requires a high level of skill and could come from outside your organisation. Their role is to clarify the source of the dispute, facilitate the group identifying solutions for themselves, and establish a course of action when a particular solution is identified. The mediator should not inflict their own point-of-view on the group.

Hui Māori

Hui Māori are another instance of a formal meeting. Below is an example of how a hui on a marae may be organised. However, it is important to note that there are other ways of conducting hui Māori on and off the marae. This is dealt with briefly in the 'Flexibility of hui Māori' section.

Example of a hui held on a marae

Māori hui on marae are governed by the protocol (kawa) of the marae. These may differ depending on the iwi concerned. A meeting on a marae may be organised in the following way:

- pōwhiri and mihi (greetings) from tangata whenua
- mihi whakahoki (response) from those attending or visiting (manuhiri). The protocols governing who may speak and the order of speeches are dictated by the kawa of the tangata whenua (or at the discretion of the tangata whenua, another kawa may be adopted – for example in heavy rain, the guests may be called straight into the house). Speeches of tangata whenua and manuhiri generally include acknowledgement of meeting house and tūpuna (ancestors), ngā mate (deceased), then the mountain, river, chiefs and tribe of the speaker.
- speeches are usually followed by a supporting waiata (song) from the speaker's supporters
- the last manuhiri speaker lays down the koha (gift) at the conclusion of their speech
- tangata whenua invite those people present to harirū (shake hands/hongi/kiss)
- after the harirū, food is shared. This represents cleansing of the visiting party so they become noa (ordinary) and part of tangata whenua
- the meeting business is usually preceded by a karakia (prayer or ritual chant)
- the take (the reason for the meeting) is introduced
- the kaupapa (procedure or format) is decided
- speakers stand and address the gathering. They have the right to be heard uninterrupted

- decision-making is usually by consensus, though there may be a vote at the end of discussion to formalise a decision
- poroporoaki (farewell) when closure is reached by ‘tying up any loose knots’ and reconfirming mutual ties
- the hui ends with a karakia.

Note: Hui held in venues other than marae may be run along similar lines.

Flexibility of hui Māori

In the book *Kōrero Tahī: Talking Together*, Joan Metge illustrates alternative procedures for conducting hui Māori that can be adapted to different situations from small group discussions to conference-type settings.

Tikanga (rules)

According to Metge, the tikanga (rules) governing discussion at hui Māori are not hard-and-fast directives (though the inexperienced are tempted to treat them as such). They are flexible guidelines that both encourage and require modification according to different circumstances e.g. whether the hui is being held on or off a marae complex or whether visitors are present or not.

Despite this flexibility, Metge mentions five rules of basic importance at hui Māori:

- the use of physical space to express and mediate social relationships
- the making of a distinction between tangata whenua (people of the land) and manuhiri (visitors)
- the framing of discussion with karakia (prayer) and with ceremonials of greeting and farewell
- the vesting of responsibility for the management of discussion in participants as a group
- the appropriate use of one, two or three distinct modes of discussion.

An example of flexibility

One of the examples Metge uses to illustrate how hui Māori can be adapted, is the pōwhiri. This is the welcoming ceremony designed to introduce individuals and groups to each other to reduce feelings of strangeness, anxiety or hostility, so that everyone feels comfortable enough to engage in discussion.

Metge advocates that in a marae setting, rather than the speeches being entirely or mainly in Māori, organisers of the hui could consider providing English translations or summaries of the speeches either during or after the pōwhiri. This used to be common on marae and in such situations as the Māori Land Court sittings where Pākehā were present. However, this practice has fallen out of favour in a drive to extend the use of te reo Māori (Māori language).

For venues other than marae, a welcoming ceremony could be designed that uses the English language but also recognises the status of Māori as an official language and the presence of speakers of other languages. For example, the Māori language could be used to begin and end the ceremony with karanga (call of welcome) and karakia (prayer) and again in the first speech and in waiata. Then speakers from minority groups could be invited to use their own languages in speeches and songs, provided they explain the content in English.

Such adaptations are possible throughout other parts of the hui (refer to *Kōrero Tahī: Talking Together* for further details).

Where to go for more information

Online resources

1. **EffectiveMeetings.com** (US) – <http://www.effectivemeetings.com/> . Online resource centre offering hands-on meeting advice for every possible situation.
2. **Te Puni Kōkiri's Effective Governance** – <http://governance.tpk.govt.nz/> . See information on annual general meetings.
3. **SPARC Club Kit** – <http://www.sparc.govt.nz/en-nz/communities-and-clubs/Toolkit-for-Clubs/Running-your-Club/> . Committees, Roles and Meetings section includes an overview of how to run successful meetings.
4. **Aotearoa Youth Voices Toolkit** – <http://www.myd.govt.nz/about-myd/publications/aotearoa-youth-voices-toolkit.html> . Running meeting action guide gives information and tips on how to have successful meetings for planning and organising activities.
5. **Māori.org.nz** – <http://www.maori.org.nz/tikanga/default.asp> . Tikanga section has definitions and information on Māori customs and traditions.
6. **Developing Your Organisation Manual** (AUS) – <https://wiki.qut.edu.au/display/CPNS/Meetings> . The Meetings chapter describes how to organise and run a successful meeting.
7. **Towards more effective meetings** – Our community (AUS) – http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards/boards_article.jsp?articleId=1307 . Help sheets to ensure your meetings become more harmonious, productive and effective.
8. **Basic Guide to Conducting Effective Meetings** – The Free Management Library (US) <http://www.managementhelp.org/misc/mtgmgmnt.htm> . Information and suggestions for managing meetings.

Other resources

1. **A Guide To: Successful Meetings, North Shore Community and Social Services.** Covers the roles and responsibilities of the Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer, plus meeting procedures and guides to formal and informal meetings. See <http://www.nscss.org.nz/> .
2. **The Meetings Manual: How to chair and participate effectively in meetings**, Lora Mountjoy. A guide to the process of formal meetings, ways of running less formal meetings and tips for making meetings work well.
3. **The Zen of Groups – A handbook for people meeting with a purpose**, Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey and Bill Taylor. Available from: <http://www.zenergyglobal.com/docs/books.htm> .
4. **The Art of Facilitation**, Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey and Bill Taylor. A training resource for understanding and teaching the secrets of group facilitation. Available from: <http://www.zenergyglobal.com/docs/books.htm> .
5. **Kōrero Tahi: Talking Together**, Joan Metge. Offers a procedure for managing group discussion in settings where Māori and non-Māori from different ethnic backgrounds meet to talk about common concerns.